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ABSTRACT

A study examined the attitudes of 107 preservice teachers at the University of Iowa regarding which social institution (home, church, or school) should be responsible for teaching values to young people. The literature was reviewed to find an adequate survey instrument to measure the variables of interest from a similar study, and a survey instrument was discovered from a similar study designed to investigate value-based issues. Preservice teachers were given a questionnaire listing 45 distinct values and were asked to rank order which social institution should have primary, secondary, or least responsibility for teaching each value to young people. Findings show that preservice teachers believe that the home, school, and church should have primary, secondary, and least responsibility, respectively, for teaching values to young people. Due to the limited research conducted in this area, the results of this study are important. Furthermore, the study represents the first attempt to quantify attitudes of preservice teachers regarding teaching values to young people. (Contains a table of data and 13 references.) (Author/BT)

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by Lamont Flowers

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# WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING VALUES TO YOUNG PEOPLE?:
## *From The Perspective of Preservice Teachers*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper reports the findings of a research study that examined the attitudes of 107 preservice teachers at the University of Iowa regarding which social institution (home, church, or school) should be responsible for teaching values to young people. The authors began by reviewing the literature to find an adequate survey instrument to measure the variables of interest. Accordingly, the authors discovered a survey instrument from a similar study designed to investigate value-based issues. Preservice teachers were given a questionnaire listing forty-five distinct values and were asked to rank order which social institution should have primary, secondary, or least responsibility for teaching each value to young people. The findings show that preservice teachers believe that the home, school, and church should have primary, secondary, and least responsibility, respectively, for teaching values to young people. Due to the limited research conducted in this area, the results of this study are important. Furthermore, this study represents the first attempt to quantify attitudes of preservice teachers regarding teaching values to young people.

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### Introduction

Today there is an ongoing debate about who should be responsible for teaching values to young people. However, most researchers and educators agree that the home, church, and school should combine forces to teach values to young people. (Clark, 1977; Berger, 1982; Andrews, 1995) Lacking from the research are perspectives from preservice teachers concerning who should be responsible for teaching values to young people. The purpose of this exploratory research study was to examine this issue from the viewpoint of preservice teachers. The work of Phi Delta Kappa International primarily motivated this research study. (Frymier, Cunningham, Duckett, Gansneder, Link, Rimmer, and Scholz, 1995) Using the data collection framework provided by Phi Delta Kappa International, we collected data to address our research question. This research is unique, as it represents the first attempt to assess the attitudes of preservice teachers concerning which social institution (home, church, or school) should have primary, secondary, or least responsibility for teaching values to young people.

## Background

The controversy regarding which social institution should be responsible for teaching values has been around for many years. In response to this question Wilson, Williams, and Sugarman (1967) assert:

> Some say 'Everything important happens in the home', or 'All the damage is done in the first five years'. Others say 'It's not the business of us parents, what do we send our kids to school for, after all?', or 'The churches ought to take care of all that'. Those in charge of various institutions say things like 'Moral education isn't our job, we're here to teach academic disciplines' or 'to train teachers' or 'to get the children to pass their exams' or 'to produce more technologists'. (p. 401)

This fundamental question is still a matter of disagreement among educators and researchers.

## Teaching Values in School

Some educators argue that parents and religious institutions have had a negligible impact on the values of children in this country and that it is up to the schools to improve the quality of a child's life through values education. (Clark, 1977) This sentiment is felt in light of the recent transformations in the American student. American students have replaced morally acceptable behavior with irresponsible behavior. (Josephson, 1992) As a result, researchers contend that teaching values in the schools is a necessity. (Dewey, 1909; Wynne and Ryan, 1993; Andrews, 1995) However, educators agree on how the school should teach values. Nevertheless, research has shown that there are values that many people agree should be taught in the schools. (Josephson, 1992; Frymier, Cunningham, Duckett, Gansneder, Link, Rimmer, and Scholz, 1995)

Due to the amount of contact with the student, the teacher should be responsible for correcting problems in their students' moral reasoning as they arise. (Kohlberg, 1972) The classroom is a great place to teach values. "What better place is there to become a worthwhile, compassionate, informed human being than in the classroom with educated professionals who care about children and their whole lives as well as their intellectual learning." (Andrews, 1995) When asked, who should be responsible for teaching values to young people?, Edward Wynne (1995), author of Reclaiming Our Schools, writes:

> Schools are and must be concerned about pupils' morality. Any institution with custody of children or adolescents for long periods of time, such as a school, inevitably affects the character of its charges. By its rules or policies, the institution shapes pupils' behavior. This shaping either encourages or discourages pupils' "good" conduct (e.g., kindness, honesty, obedience). It is impossible for schools to avoid such effects on their pupils. (p. 151)

## Teaching Values at Church

Some researchers argue that schools are incapable of adequately teaching values to young people. (Berger, 1982) Moreover, they support the belief that teaching values have a more powerful effect if people view them as spiritual teachings. (Iheoma, 1986) Since the beginning of time, various beliefs and notions about creation and God have served as moral guidelines on how people should conduct their daily lives. Thus, religious institutions have always been known as the primary institution for effectively teaching values. Consequently, religious institutions can advance the goals of teaching values with relative ease.

In some respects, religious institutions can be more effective in teaching values because they have more freedom as to their methods of indoctrination (Iheoma, 1986).

**Teaching Values in the Home**

It is the responsibility of the parent to teach moral values to their children in both theory and practice. (Humes, 1988) Similarly, some researchers feel that the child's parents should be the first and indisputably the most significant teacher of values. (Andrews, 1995; Thomas and Roberts, 1994) They contend the lessons that we learn at home should serve to promote a significant degree of morality in the child. (Humes, 1988) They support this contention with the viewpoint that since parents are the primary caregivers it follows that the first lessons about right and wrong should come from the parents.

Presently, there is no research available regarding the measurement of preservice teachers concerning who should be responsible for teaching values to young people. Thus, we do not posit research hypotheses. Instead, we postulate a specific research question: *According to a sample of preservice teachers at The University of Iowa, which social institution (home, church, or school) should have primary, secondary, or least responsibility for teaching values to young people?*

**Research Design**

Participants in this study represented the following subject areas: English, Social Studies, Elementary Math, and Foreign Language. Our sample size consisted of 107 preservice teachers enrolled in methods courses in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. The number of respondents per subject area was: English (25), Elementary Math (53), Social Studies (7), and Foreign Language (22). The mean age of the participants in this study was 23.8. Of the participants 79% were female. Initially, the researchers conducted a pilot study with 120 students enrolled in Foundations of Education at the University of Iowa. Following the pilot study, the researchers reviewed and modified the survey process. The researchers then administered the survey instruments to each of the four subject area groups represented in the sample.

As stated earlier, the survey instrument used in the present study was taken from a formal study done by Phi Delta Kappa International. (Frymier, Cunningham, Duckett, Gansneder, Link, Rimmer, and Scholz, 1995) Specifically, we asked participants to respond to the section of the survey designed to determine which social institution (home, church, or school) should be responsible for teaching values to young people. The survey instrument listed 45 values. Preservice teachers were asked to rank order which social institution should have primary, secondary, or least responsibility for teaching each value listed on the instrument. Marking in 1, 2, or 3 indicated primary, secondary, or least responsibility, respectively on the survey instrument. Phi Delta Kappa International scored the surveys and generated frequency distributions. The researchers analyzed the data and calculated mean scores for each social institution for every value listed on the survey instrument. The researchers then calculated the total mean level of responsibility for each social institution.

## TABLE 1

### Who Should Be Responsible for Teaching Values to Young People?

**(Mean Scores; mean scores close to one (1) indicate primary responsibility, mean scores close to two (2) indicate secondary responsibility, mean scores close to three (3) indicate least responsibility)**

| Item No. | Stated Value | Home Mean | Church Mean | School Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Ambitious, hard working, aspiring | 1.17 | 2.89 | 1.86 |
| 2. | Broad-minded, open-minded, tolerant | 1.32 | 2.67 | 1.90 |
| 3. | Capable, competent, effective | 1.44 | 2.85 | 1.65 |
| 4. | Cheerful, lighthearted, joyful | 1.16 | 2.48 | 2.30 |
| 5. | Clean, neat, tidy | 1.06 | 2.87 | 2.02 |
| 6. | Courageous, stand up for beliefs | 1.23 | 2.44 | 2.25 |
| 7. | Forgiving, willing to pardon others | 1.30 | 2.21 | 2.40 |
| 8. | Helpful, cooperative, assistive | 1.20 | 2.75 | 1.95 |
| 9. | Honest, truthful | 1.18 | 2.40 | 2.30 |
| 10. | Imaginative, daring, creative | 1.50 | 2.92 | 1.53 |
| 11. | Independent, self reliant, autonomous | 1.25 | 2.82 | 1.80 |
| 12. | Intelligent, reflective, ingenious | 1.57 | 2.92 | 1.47 |
| 13. | Logical, consistent, rational | 1.60 | 2.74 | 1.50 |
| 14. | Loving, affectionate, tender | 1.07 | 2.38 | 2.49 |
| 15. | Obedient, dutiful, respectful | 1.15 | 2.62 | 2.15 |
| 16. | Polite, courteous | 1.10 | 2.72 | 2.10 |
| 17. | Responsible, dependable, reliable | 1.10 | 2.85 | 1.99 |
| 18. | Self controlled, restrained | 1.23 | 2.76 | 1.98 |
| 19. | Accepting of others, non-prejudicial | 1.38 | 2.53 | 1.99 |
| 20. | Kind, considerate, respectful | 1.10 | 2.64 | 2.17 |
| 21. | Prudent, careful, not impulsive | 1.30 | 2.65 | 2.03 |
| 22. | Healthy, strong, vigorous | 1.13 | 2.87 | 1.98 |
| 23. | Altruistic, giving of one's self | 1.24 | 2.25 | 2.47 |
| 24. | Reverent, worshipful, merciful | 1.52 | 1.73 | 2.77 |
| 25. | Persevering, persistent, resolute | 1.26 | 2.71 | 2.02 |
| 26. | Frugal, prudent, thrifty | 1.19 | 2.63 | 2.21 |
| 27. | Chaste, morally pure, virtuous | 1.36 | 1.97 | 2.67 |
| 28. | Peaceful, non-violent, compassionate | 1.25 | 2.38 | 2.28 |
| 29. | Determined, purposeful | 1.20 | 2.84 | 1.92 |
| 30. | Committed, dedicated, concerned | 1.19 | 2.75 | 2.00 |
| 31. | God-fearing, respectful of authority | 1.44 | 1.89 | 2.62 |
| 32. | Happy, contented, relaxed | 1.04 | 2.67 | 2.20 |
| 33. | Upright, honorable, decent | 1.08 | 2.53 | 2.30 |
| 34. | Friendly, outgoing, approachable | 1.11 | 2.77 | 2.05 |
| 35. | Confident, assured, self respectful | 1.11 | 2.80 | 2.04 |
| 36. | Hard-working, productive, a doer | 1.16 | 2.86 | 1.91 |
| 37. | Works for betterment of others | 1.20 | 2.45 | 2.18 |
| 38. | Curious, interested, inquisitive | 1.33 | 2.86 | 1.73 |
| 39. | Appreciative of beauty, form, art | 1.45 | 2.79 | 1.75 |
| 40. | Skilled, accomplished, proficient | 1.43 | 2.94 | 1.61 |
| 41. | Civil, well-mannered | 1.06 | 2.76 | 2.12 |
| 42. | Moral, ethical, principled | 1.17 | 2.33 | 2.42 |
| 43. | Clean mind, clean body | 1.10 | 2.41 | 2.41 |
| 44. | Self directing, self disciplined, free | 1.14 | 2.75 | 2.08 |
| 45. | Benevolent, magnanimous, generous | 1.14 | 2.46 | 2.37 |
| **Mean of the Means** | | **1.23** | **2.61** | **2.08** |

## Results

Mean analysis was initially used to determine how the participants rank ordered each stated value in terms of their respective responsibility level for each social institution (home, church, and school). The individual mean scores for each value and total mean scores for each institution are presented in Table 1. As Table 1 shows, the total mean scores are 1.23, 2.61, and 2.08 for home, church, and school respectively.

The breakdown of the level of responsibility for each social institution in terms of the percentage of the 45 values listed on the questionnaire yielded similar information and insight. The data reveals that the home should have primary responsibility for teaching 96% (43) of the values listed on the survey instrument. Conversely, the data shows that the home should have secondary responsibility for teaching 4% (2) the values listed on the survey instrument. Also, the data reveals that the church should have least responsibility for teaching 84% (37) of the values listed on the survey instrument. Conversely, the data reveals that the church should have secondary responsibility for teaching 16% (7) of the values listed on the survey instrument. Furthermore, the data reveals that the school should have secondary responsibility for teaching 84% (37) of the values listed on the survey instrument. Conversely, the data reveals that the school should have least responsibility for teaching 16% (7) of the values listed on the survey instrument.

## Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the attitudes of preservice teachers regarding which social institution should be responsible for teaching values to young people. The first step was to find a comprehensive survey instrument. To accomplish this task we were assisted by Phi Delta Kappa International who provided us with a survey instrument used to measure these variables in a similar study. (Frymier, Cunningham, Duckett, Gansneder, Link, Rimmer, and Scholz, 1995)

Findings from our research indicate that preservice teachers regard the home, school, and church as having primary, secondary, and least responsibility, respectively, for teaching values to young people. These findings could suggest that preservice teachers understand that the school should have an integral part in shaping the moral values of the young people they will teach. Alternatively, these findings could suggest that preservice teachers do not feel that it is their responsibility for teaching values to young people.

We recognize that this research study has two noticeable limitations: 1) sample size, 2) number of subject areas represented in the sample. Nevertheless, we believe this study represents a significant first step in attempting to quantify the beliefs of preservice teachers in this area. However, further research needs to be conducted in the future to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of preservice teachers with respect to this issue and other value-based issues.

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